

Report by:
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SRO Housing was created in 1984 by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of the City of Los Angeles with the mission to create clean, safe, affordable housing for homeless and very low-income persons.

Over the past 31 years, we have worked diligently to remove blight and homelessness, most specifically in the Central City East (Skid Row) area of downtown Los Angeles. We have transformed a burned-out cocktail lounge, slum hotels, and trash-filled lots to contemporary, studio apartments that are permanent homes for low-income and homeless individuals and, we just opened our largest development, the Rosslyn Hotel Apartments, with 264 units for chronically homeless individuals and Veterans.

SRO Housing has rehabilitated, as well as built from the ground up, 29 residential facilities that currently houses over 2,400 persons. Thousands of lives have been transformed through the process of moving people from homelessness to housing. We know this works. Additionally, over 40% of our staff have come from the Skid Row community. They are Janitors, Property Managers, Program Managers, Food Service Workers, etc. and, they even work in our Corporate office.

SRO Housing built the only Community Center in the area, the James Wood Community Center, which serves hundreds of free meals daily, AND, up until July, we managed two pocket parks (San Julian and Gladys Parks) for over 25 years.

However, the ability to carry out our mission has become increasingly more challenging over the past decade. It feels as if we are turning back the clock in many instances.

Only a couple of years ago, you could walk freely down the streets. Today, the sidewalks are literally blocked with tents, and littered with trash. Residents are afraid to come out of their own homes and attempt to navigate through a maze of drug dealers, persons with mental illnesses, prison releasees, and hundreds of predators who take advantage of the vulnerability of homeless persons, often with special needs. Many of them have said they feel like prisoners in their own home. Also, those tents do not have restrooms. You can only imagine what the consequence of that is. Our doorways become the restrooms. This has truly become a health and safety issue.

Our staff have expressed deep concern about their personal health and safety simply trying to get to their office, and to be able to walk from building to building.

I have been worked in the Social Services field for over 35 years and have worked with SRO Housing Corporation for over 15 years to develop and provide supportive services for homeless persons with the ultimate goal of placing them in permanent supportive housing.

We have developed programs for many special needs populations such as persons with mental illnesses, substance addictions, HIV/AIDS, physical disabilities, chronic health conditions, as well as specialty programs for Seniors and Veterans. SRO Housing, in fact, has had a Veterans Transitional Housing Program for over 16 years and we have hundreds of Veterans living in our permanent housing.

These programs have proven to be exceptionally successful as we were able to place on average 50 persons a month in permanent housing. In fact, our model has been sought after at national conferences throughout the United States.

Even with this well-proven model, our ability to carry out our mission has become more and more difficult. There has been less and less funding over the years for programs to assist homeless persons with special needs such as homeless individuals with mental illnesses, physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS, substance addictions, chronic health conditions, as well as Seniors and Veterans.

Additionally, money is being redirected to permanent supportive housing while ALL types of housing are desperately needed. Unfortunately, there IS no adequate supply of permanent supportive housing, especially in the Skid Row area. We need to have a variation of housing options in order to address this matter. The approach of redirecting funds has only resulted in the closing of desperately needed housing. Studies have shown over and over again, that leaving homeless people on the streets winds up costing taxpayers more than three times as much as simply giving them housing and supportive services—regardless of the type of housing.

While various entities continue to ponder and experiment with what to do about homelessness, the number of homeless persons living on the streets of Los Angeles is continuing to increase.

There needs to be a coordinated effort coming from governmental entities with definitive goals to address homelessness. We are all working in separate silos rather than off one, singular master plan. Homelessness affects ALL areas throughout the County.

I know that the goal of this Commission is “to identify and recommend cost-effective and efficient alternatives for the delivery of multi-jurisdictional services within the County of Los Angeles” and I appreciate that.

However, let me say from my vantage point, what I see as some concerns around this matter.

With all due respect to the many government and non-government entities who have been working on the “problem” of homelessness, let me say first what we don’t need.

We don’t need:

1. Another homeless count to determine if there are homeless persons in Los Angeles. I know, I know... we have to have stats for funding purposes. ☺
2. Another study to determine what to do about homelessness in Los Angeles.
3. Another experimental approach or pilot project to address homelessness.
4. Another outside Consultant to tell us how to fix the homelessness problem in Los Angeles. May be perceived as too harsh – too direct.
5. More meetings, workgroups, surveys, community meetings, discussion groups, etc, etc. to “talk about” homelessness rather than developing plans to “address” homelessness.

SRO Housing has been in the business of addressing homeless for over 31 years and we’ve developed an exceptionally successful infrastructure to stabilize and place homeless persons with special needs into permanent supportive housing. The infrastructure is already there to do the job.

What we DO need is:

1. A coordinated plan to address homelessness and not just throw money at the latest recommendation given by whoever yells the loudest. We need the Mayor’s Office, the Homeless Coordinator, the County Board of Supervisors, the City Council, LAHSA, and all of the non-governmental entities that are trying to address homelessness to come up with a coordinated plan in order to direct the resources appropriately.
2. A plan to decentralize services and housing from the downtown area and to provide housing throughout Los Angeles County. We need to stop focusing on placing people in Skid Row—the area is already saturated! Homelessness is a County-wide problem—not just a small area in downtown Los Angeles.
3. Money to cover a wide range of housing options and not limit funds just to one or two possibilities.

For example, as we speak, SRO Housing has a building sitting vacant in the heart of Skid Row on the corner of 5th and San Julian Streets that has 220 private units of housing available to take persons in off the street literally overnight. The site has been used to provide emergency/short-term housing for 30 years. However, the building sits idle because funding is directed away from providing temporary housing that is needed to prepare persons for permanent housing. In fact, the recommended plan is to convert the building from 220 private units of temporary housing into 71 units of permanent housing.

As you can see, that is a loss of 149 units of housing that is desperately needed. This makes no sense when we are trying to address thousands of people living on the streets. In fact, if we put bunk beds in those units, we could take in over 400 persons immediately off the street. All we need is the funding to pay for that. The housing is already available.

While numerous entities are throwing millions of dollars at studies, homeless counts, surveys, consultants, pilot projects, community meetings, workgroups, etc., the number of homeless persons on the streets is increasing. We simply need money for “housing and services.” We already know there are a lot of homeless persons and we already know how to put them in housing. We have a proven track record in this regard.

This is not a new phenomena. It has been around forever AND it will continue to be around. We simply have to develop a sustainable plan and focus the resources to the plan in order to address this ongoing situation. No matter how much we continue to experiment and tinker with the system, it will not stop the flow of homelessness. Thank you for allowing me to express my personal views about this matter. I hope that I have provided some information that will be helpful in you making recommendations to address homelessness at large.